United Nations

A/61/300

General Assembly

Distr.: General
29 August 2006

Original: English

Sixty-first session
Items 115 and 119 of the provisional agenda*

Programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007

Pattern of conferences

Impact of the capital master plan on meetings to be held at Headquarters during its implementation

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The report on the impact of the capital mater plan on meetings to be held at Headquarters during its implementation is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/282. The report includes a review of the proposed plan of the temporary conference facilities contained in the third annual progress report on the implementation of the capital mater plan (A/60/550), and an analysis and assessment of the impact of the plan on meetings held at Headquarters during the construction period. The report also contains recommendations for the General Assembly on the planning and scheduling of calendar meetings and on any adjustments that might be called for during the implementation of the capital mater plan, strategy IV (phased approach).

* A/61/150.

06-48371 (E) 060906

I. Introduction

1. In paragraph 8 of its resolution 60/282, the General Assembly approved, effective 1 July 2006, the recommended strategy for the implementation of the capital master plan, strategy IV (phased approach), contained in the third annual progress report of the Secretary-General, including the phasing, swing space and cost, and decided to review the updated projected costs at the main part of the sixty-first session. In paragraph 9, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit proposals to it at its sixty-first session, through the Committee on Conferences, on the possible adjustment of meeting schedules, including a change in venue of meetings for the United Nations intergovernmental organs that normally meet at Headquarters for the period of the implementation of the capital master plan. The present report is submitted pursuant to that request.

2. The Secretariat reviewed the proposed plan for the temporary conference facilities in the swing space on the North Lawn drawn up according to strategy IV (phased approach), taking into consideration the functions and space of the existing conference facilities in the General Assembly and Conference Buildings, and analysed and assessed the possible impact on meetings of the organs established by the Charter of the United Nations, their subsidiary bodies and other intergovernmental organizations, which are normally held at Headquarters, for the period of the implementation of the capital master plan, strategy IV (phased approach).

II. Review of the proposed plan of the temporary conference facilities

3. In the third annual progress report on the implementation of the capital master plan (A/60/550), it was mentioned under strategy IV (phased approach) that a temporary conference facility would be built on the North Lawn to accommodate a part of the meeting space requirements.

4. The entire renovation of the General Assembly and Conference Buildings will consist of three phases, and the projected time frame for each phase will be June 2008 to February 2011 for the General Assembly Building, involving the renovation of the General Assembly Hall and Conference Rooms 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8; February 2011 to July 2012 for the first basement of the Conference Building, involving Conference Rooms 1, 2, 3, 9, 10 and A to E; and August 2012 to October 2013 for the second, third and fourth floors of the Conference Building, involving the Security Council Chamber, the Trusteeship Council Chamber, the Economic and Social Council Chamber and their adjacent areas. Most of the construction activities will take place outside of normal meeting hours. Although certain planned stoppages can be provided for in the construction contracts, any other unforeseen work stoppages will add to the cost and duration of the project.

5. Three additional medium conference rooms will be added in the north-east wing of the General Assembly building, and will be named Conference Rooms 11, 12 and 13. The construction of those rooms will be undertaken in conjunction with the renovation of the other portion of the General Assembly Building. Two of the three rooms will have an interior configuration similar to that of the existing Conference Room 5, and will be equipped with standard interpretation facilities.

The remaining one, with an audio system only, will be used as a multi-purpose room. Those rooms will become operational from February 2011.

6. Strategy IV (phased approach) will concentrate Headquarters activities in one location, with a planned arrangement for the most efficient use of the space in temporary conference facilities while parts of the existing buildings are under renovation. The construction of the swing space is projected to start in July 2007 and finish in June 2008 to prepare for the evacuation and renovation of the General Assembly Building. While the General Assembly Building is under renovation, the temporary facilities in the swing space will be able to accommodate all meetings that would have been held in the General Assembly Building at that time. Two large conference rooms in the swing space will be combined to replace the General Assembly Hall. When the renovation of the General Assembly Building is completed it will be reoccupied, releasing the temporary conference facilities in the swing space to accommodate meetings normally held in the first basement of the Conference Building. The same formula will be applied to the renovation of the remaining conference rooms on the second floor of the Conference Building, including the third and fourth floors.

7. Although the temporary conference building will accommodate a one-for-one replacement of the existing meeting facilities under renovation in a given phase, the actual assignment of a location for a particular meeting may be influenced by considerations of security, the nature of other construction activity, accessibility for press and media, or requirements for meetings outside of normal working hours. It must be assumed that the assignment of specific locations will remain flexible.

III. Analysis and assessment of the impact on meetings held at Headquarters

8. The calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for the period of the implementation of the capital master plan, namely from 2008 to 2013, has not yet been prepared. However, in view of the past pattern of conferences, it is anticipated that there will be about 3,000 meetings of intergovernmental organs and bodies held at Headquarters each year during the period of the implementation.

9. As the proposed construction of the temporary conference facilities in the swing space will offer a room-for-room replacement, to be done in three phases, the total number of conference rooms required for holding the above-mentioned meetings will be made available in a combination of both the temporary and the existing conference facilities during each construction phase. Most of the functions of the existing conference facilities will be retained, although there will be some loss in terms of the total space. All the large conference rooms in the temporary conference facilities will have approximately the same number of seats for delegations as in the existing large conference rooms. However, when the General Assembly Hall is replaced by combining two large conference rooms in the temporary conference facilities, there will be space for only four rather than six seats per delegation (see A/60/550, para. 16). The gallery space of large conference rooms in the temporary conference facilities will be very limited, with a significant reduction in the number of seats. Whereas the existing large conference rooms can now accommodate 200 to 350 participants in the gallery area, depending on the room, approximately 80 will be accommodated in the large conference rooms and

space for 160 is envisaged in the plenary hall of the General Assembly in the temporary conference facilities. The layouts of the medium and small conference rooms in the temporary conference facilities will remain similar to those in the existing medium and small conference rooms. After work is completed on the General Assembly Building, the strain on space will be somewhat eased with the additional space gained from Conference Rooms 11 to 13.

10. Nevertheless, owing to the loss of a certain amount of space, especially with the space reduction in the gallery area of the large conference rooms in the temporary conference facilities during the renovation, a possible curtailment of space for parallel activities involving large numbers of participants that often accompany meetings of calendar bodies is also foreseen. Those activities include summits, special sessions and high-level meetings of the General Assembly, meetings of intergovernmental bodies which normally have large numbers of side events and/or outreach consultative rooms, such as the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Commission on the Status of Women and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and some conferences and special meetings in the economic, social, legal and disarmament fields.

11. Although the furniture arrangements in the temporary conference building will be flexible, the accommodation of the meetings of the principal organs will still have to be adapted, to some extent, to the interior layouts of the large conference rooms in the temporary conference facilities. The temporary large conference rooms will be more generic than the current chambers, which were designed to meet the specific needs of each organ.

12. Another area that will be lost from June 2008 to February 2011 during the renovation of the General Assembly Building is the area behind the Hall where from 20 to 30 booths are temporarily set up every year for bilateral meetings during the general debate of the General Assembly. Some of the small conference rooms may have to accommodate bilateral booths during those periods, which would mean that they would not be available for other meetings.

13. The exhibition space in the area between the General Assembly Building and the Conference Building will be completely lost during the renovation, with no ready alternative solution. That space is usually in high demand and fully occupied with displays and exhibitions related to the subject matters of intergovernmental bodies when they are in session. As a result of the loss of the space, exhibitions related to the work of the Organization may have to be temporarily discontinued. If alternative exhibition space can be identified, such as lobby areas and hallways both in the swing space and in the existing conference facilities, the needs for exhibitions may be partially met.

14. The temporary conference building is planned to include conference support space, specifically to accommodate a temporary version of the suites of offices at the back of the existing large conference rooms on the garden level of the Conference Building, as well as a few caucus rooms next to the three chambers on the second floor of the building, although at a limited capacity.

IV. Conclusions

15. Owing to the advantages offered by strategy IV (phased approach), Headquarters activities will be largely retained at the current site during the renovation. The Headquarters complex will be a construction zone, however. The most effective way to manage during construction is to maintain set meeting schedules with minimum changes in meeting times and/or arrangements. Even though there will be limited flexibility in rescheduling or moving meetings, and despite a certain amount of inconvenience inherent in meeting while construction continues, core activities of the organs established by the Charter and other intergovernmental bodies in the calendar of conferences and meetings would not be affected if planned well ahead and scheduled carefully.

16. Therefore, the Secretariat anticipates that the programme of meetings normally included in the calendar of conferences and meetings can be accommodated and that no change of venue will be required for intergovernmental organs and bodies that normally meet at Headquarters during the period of implementation of the capital master plan.

17. However, it is noted that there will not be sufficient conference facilities to accommodate activities in excess of the core activities of the organs established by the Charter and their subsidiary bodies, especially during the first phase of the renovation. Parallel consultations, that is meetings, outside the legislatively mandated number of sessions, and events that would require additional space and involve a large number of participants should be avoided, reduced or held off site.

V. Recommendations

18. With a view to ensuring the smooth implementation of both the capital master plan, strategy IV, and the calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for the period from 2008 to 2013, the General Assembly may wish:

(a) To inform calendar bodies that, when planning their meetings, especially major or high-level conferences, summits and special meetings, organs established by the Charter of the United Nations, their subsidiary bodies and other intergovernmental organizations and treaty bodies that normally meet at Headquarters should take into consideration the limitations and inflexibility of the entire conference facilities at Headquarters throughout the renovation period;

(b) To instruct all requestors and organizers of meetings that the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management should be closely consulted on all matters related to the scheduling of meetings to allow maximum predictability in coordinating the Headquarters activities and the construction work;

(c) To note that all meetings, with the exception of those of the Security Council, the General Assembly and the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council, should be held strictly within regular meeting hours, namely from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and from 3 to 6 p.m. on working days, in order to ensure that nights and weekends will be made available for the construction work and to reduce the additional costs and inconvenience of disruption to the construction plan.

(d) To request the Committee on Conferences to keep the matter under review, particularly in the context of calendars of conferences and meetings of the United Nations during the construction period, and to request the Secretariat to report periodically thereon to the General Assembly through the Committee.